

ART AND THE BEAUTY OF THE  
EARTH. BY WILLIAM MORRIS.

C 7/6







Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/artbeautyofearth00morr>





ART AND THE BEAUTY OF THE  
EARTH. BY WILLIAM MORRIS.





ART AND THE BEAUTY OF THE  
EARTH. A LECTURE DELIVERED  
BY WILLIAM MORRIS AT BURSLEM  
TOWN HALL ON OCTOBER 13, 1881.

WE are here in the midst of a population busied about a craft which may be called the most ancient in the world, a craft which I look upon with the greatest interest, as I well may, since, except perhaps the noble craft of house-building, it is second to none other. And in the midst of this industrious population, engaged in making goods of such importance to our households, I am speaking to a School of Art, one of the bodies that were founded all over the country at a time when it was felt there was something wrong as between the two elements that go to make anything which can be correctly described as a work of industrial art, namely the utilitarian and the artistic elements. I hope nothing I may say to-night will make you think that I under-value the importance of these places of instruction ; on the contrary, I believe them to be necessary to us, unless we are prepared to give up all attempt to unite these two elements of use and beauty.

Now, though no man can be more impressed with the importance of the art of pottery than I am, and though I have not, I hope, neglected the study of it from the artistic or historico-artistic side, I do not think myself bound to follow up the subject of your especial art ; not so much because

Lecture II. I know no more of the technical side of it than I  
Art and the have thought enough to enable me to understand  
Beauty of it from the above-said historico-artistic side; but  
the Earth. rather because I feel it almost impossible to dis-  
sociate one of the ornamental arts from the others,  
as things go now-a-days. Neither do I think I  
should interest you much, still less instruct you,  
if I were to recapitulate the general rules that  
ought to guide a designer for the industrial arts;  
at the very first foundation of these schools the in-  
structors in them formulated those rules clearly &  
satisfactorily, and I think they have since been ac-  
cepted generally, at least in theory. What I do  
really feel myself bound to do is to speak to you  
of certain things that are never absent from my  
thoughts, certain considerations on the condition  
and prospects of the arts in general, the neglect of  
which conditions would drive us in time into a  
strange state of things indeed; a state of things  
under which no potter would put any decoration  
on his pots, and indeed, if a man of strict logical  
mind, would never know of what shape to make  
a pot, unless the actual use it was to be put to drove  
him in one direction or another. What I have to  
say on these matters will not, I fear, be very new  
to you, and perhaps it may more or less offend  
you; but I will beg you to believe that I feel deep-  
ly the honour you have done me in asking me to  
address you. I cannot doubt you have asked me to  
do so that you might hear what I may chance to

think on the subject of the arts, and it seems to me, therefore, that I should ill repay you for that honour, and be treating you unworthily, if I were to stand here and tell you at great length what I do not think. So I will ask your leave and license to speak plainly, as I promise I will not speak lightly.

Yet I would not have you think I underrate the difficulty of the art of plain speaking, an art as difficult, perhaps, as that of pottery, and not nearly so much of it done in the world; so what I will ask you to forgive me if I wound your feelings in any way will not be my downright meaning, my audacious and rash thought, but rather my clumsy way of expressing it; and in truth I expect to have your forgiveness, since in my heart I believe that a plain word spoken because it must be said, free from malice or self-seeking, can be no lasting offence to any one, whereas, what end is there to the wrong and damage that come of half-hearted speech, of words spoken in vagueness, hypocrisy, and cowardice?

You who in these parts make such hard, smooth, well-compacted, and enduring pottery understand well that you must give it other qualities besides those which make it fit for ordinary use. You must profess to make it beautiful as well as useful, and if you did not you would certainly lose your market. That has been the view the world has taken of your art, & of all the industrial arts

Lecture II. since the beginning of history, and, as I said, is  
Art and the held to this day, whether from the force of habit  
Beauty of or otherwise.  
the Earth. Nevertheless, so different is the position of art in

our daily lives from what it used to be that it seems to me, (and I am not alone in my thought), that the world is hesitating as to whether it shall take art home to it or cast it out.

I feel that I am bound to explain what may seem a very startling as it is assuredly a very serious statement. I will do so in as few words as I can. I do not know whether a sense of the great change which has befallen the arts in modern times has come home to most, or indeed to many, of you; a change which has only culminated in quite recent times within the lives of many of you present. It may seem to you that there has been no break in the chain of art, at all events since it began to struggle out of the confusion & barbarism of the early middle ages; you may think that there has been gradual change in it, growth, improvement (not always perhaps readily recognized at first, that latter), but that all this has taken place without violence or breakdown, & that the growth & improvement are still going on.

And this seems a very reasonable view to take of it, & is analogous beyond doubt to what has happened on other sides of human progress; nay, it is on this ground that your pleasure in art is founded, & your hopes for its future. That found-



dation for hope has failed some of us; on what our hopes are founded to-day I may be able to tell you partly this evening, but I will now give you a glimpse of the abyss into which our earlier hope tumbled.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Let us look back a little to the early middle ages, the days of barbarism and confusion. As you follow the pages of the keen-eyed, cool-headed Gibbon, you may well think that the genius of the great historian has been wasted over the mean squabbles, the bald self-seeking, the ignoble superstition, the pomp and the cruelty of the kings and scoundrels who are the chief persons named in the story; yet also you cannot fail to know, when you come to think of it, that the story has not been fully told; nay scarce told at all, only a chance hint given, here and there. The palace and the camp were but a small part of their world surely; and outside them you may be sure that faith & heroism and love were at work, or what birth could there have been from those days? For the visible tokens of that birth you must seek in the art that grew up and flourished amid that barbarism and confusion, and you know who wrought it. The tyrants, and pedants, & bullies of the time paid dog's wages for it, & bribed their gods with it, but they were too busy over other things to make it; the nameless people wrought it; for no names of its makers are left, not one. Their work only is left, & all that came of it, & all that is to come of it.

Lecture II.    What came of it first was the complete freedom  
Art and the    of art in the midst of a society that had at least be-  
Beauty of    gun to free itself from religious & political fetters.  
the Earth.    Art was no longer now, as in Egypt of olden time,  
kept rigidly within certain prescribed bounds that  
no fancy might play with, no imagination over-  
pass, lest the majesty of the beautiful symbols  
might be clouded and the memory of the awful  
mysteries they symbolized become dim in the  
hearts of men. Nor was it any longer as in the  
Greece of Pericles, wherein no thought might be  
expressed that could not be expressed in perfect  
form. Art was free. Whatever a man thought of,  
that he might bring to light by the labour of his  
hands, to be praised and wondered at by his fel-  
lows. Whatever man had thought in him of any  
kind, & skill in him of any kind to express it, he  
was deemed good enough to be used for his own  
pleasure & the pleasure of his fellows; in this art  
nothing & nobody was wasted; all people east of  
the Atlantic felt this art; from Bokhara to Gal-  
way, from Iceland to Madras, all the world glit-  
tered with its brightness and quivered with its vi-  
gour. It cast down the partitions of race & religion  
also. Christian and Mussulman were made joyful  
by it; Kelt, Teuton, & Latin raised it up together;  
Persian, Tartar, and Arab gave and took its gifts  
from one another. Considering how old the world  
is it was not too long-lived at its best. In the days  
when Norwegian, Dane, and Iclander stalked

through the streets of Micklegarth, and hedged with their axes the throne of Kirialax the Greek king, it was alive & vigorous. When blind Dandolo was led from the Venetian galleys on to the conquered wall of Constantinople, it was near to its best & purest days. When Constantine Palæologus came back an old and care-worn man from a peacefuller home in the Morea to his doom in the great city, and the last Cæsar got the muddle of his life solved, not ingloriously, by Turkish swords on the breached and battered walls of that same Constantinople, there were signs of sickness beginning to show in the art that sprang from there to cover east and west alike with its glory.

And all that time it was the art of free men. Whatever slavery still existed in the world (more than enough, as always) art had no share in it; & still it was only here & there that any great names rose above the host of those that wrought it. These names (& it was mainly in Italy only) came to the front when those branches of it that were the work of collective rather than individual genius, architecture especially, had quite reached their highest perfection. Men began to look round for something more startlingly new than the slow, gradual change of architecture & the attendant lesser arts could give them. This change they found in the glorious work of the painters, & they received it with an out-spoken excitement and joy that seems

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Lecture II.    strange indeed to us in these days when art is held  
Art and the    so cheap.

Beauty of    All went better than well for a time; though in  
the Earth.    Italy architecture began to lose something of the  
                 perfection it had gained, yet it was scarcely to be  
                 noticed amidst the glory of the light that was in-  
                 creasing in painting and sculpture. In France and  
                 England meantime the change, as it was slower  
                 in growing to a head, so it had begun earlier, as  
                 witness the sculpture in the great French Churches,  
                 and the exquisite drawing of the illuminations of English  
                 books; while the Flemings, never very great in the art of  
                 building, towards the end of this period had found their  
                 true vocation as painters of a sweet and serious external  
                 naturalism, illuminated by colour unsurpassed for purity  
                 and brightness.

So had the art of the middle ages climbed gradually to the top of the hill, doubtless not without carrying the seeds of the disease that was to end it, threatenings of great change which no doubt no one heeded at the time. Nor was there much to wonder at in their blindness, since still for centuries to come their art was full of life & splendour, & when at last its death drew near men could see in it nothing but the hope of a new life. For many years, a hundred years at least, before the change really showed itself, the expression of the greater thoughts that art can deal with was being made more difficult to men not specially learned. With-



out demanding the absolute perfection that was the rule in the days of Greece, people began to look for an intricacy of treatment that the Greeks had never dreamed of; men began to see hopes of realizing scenes of history & poetry in a far more complete way than the best of their forerunners had attempted. Yet for long the severance between artist and artizan (as our nicknames go) was not obvious, though doubtless things were leading up to it; it is, perhaps, noticeable chiefly in the difference between the work of nation and nation rather than among the individual workmen. I mean, for instance, that in the thirteenth century England was going step by step with Italy as far as mere excellence is concerned, while in the middle of the fifteenth England was rude, and Italy cultured; and even while the change was preparing, by one accident or another came a great access of discoveries of the art and literature of the ancient world, &, as it were, fate ran to meet the half-expressed longings of men.

Then, indeed, all hesitation was over, and suddenly, as it now seems to us, amidst a blaze of glory, the hoped-for new birth took place. Once, as I have said, the makers of beautiful things passed away nameless; but under the Renaissance there are more names of excellent craftsmen left to us than a good memory can well remember, & among those names are the greatest the world has ever known, or perhaps ever will know. No

Lecture II. Art and the Beauty of the Earth. wonder men's exultation rose high; no wonder that their pride blinded them & that they did not know where they were; yet most pitiable and sad the story is. It was one of those strange times when men seem to themselves to have pierced through all the space which lies between longing and attainment. They, it seems, and no others, have at last reached the spot where lie heaped together all the treasures of the world, vainly sought aforetime. They, it seems, have everything, & no one of those that went before them had anything, nay, not even their fathers whose bones lie yet unrotted under the turf.

The men of the Renaissance looked at the thousand years behind them as a deedless blank, & at all that lay before them as a perpetual triumphal march. We, taught so much by other people's failures, can see their position otherwise than that. We can see that while up to that time, since art first began, it had always looked forward, now it was looking backward; that whereas once men were taught to look through the art at that which the art represented, they were now taught to deem the art an end in itself, & that it mattered nothing whether the story it told was believed or not. Once its aim was to see, now its aim was to be seen only. Once it was done to be understood, & to be helpful to all men: now the vulgar were beyond the pale, & the insults which the Greek slave-holders and the Roman tax-sweaters of old cast upon the

people, upon all men but a chosen few, were brought forth & tricked up again in fantastic guise to adorn the day of boundless hope.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Not all this, indeed, came at once, but come it did, nor very slowly either, when men once began to look back. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the new birth was in its hey-day. Before the seventeenth had quite begun, what had become of its over-weening hopes? In Venice alone of all Italy was any art being done that was of any worth. The conquered North had gained nothing from Italy save an imitation of its worst extravagance, and all that saved the art of England from nothingness was a tradition of the earlier days still lingering among a people rustic and narrow-minded indeed, but serious, truthful, & of simple habits.

I have just spoken somewhat of how this came about. But what was at the bottom of it, and what I wish you chiefly to note and remember is this, that the men of the Renaissance lent all their energies, consciously or unconsciously, to the severance of art from the daily lives of men, and that they brought it to pass, if not utterly in their own days, yet speedily and certainly. I must remind you, though I, and better men than I, have said it over & over again, that once every man that made anything made it a work of art besides a useful piece of goods, whereas now, only a very few things have even the most distant claim to be considered works



Lecture II. of art. I beg you to consider that most carefully  
Art and the and seriously, & to try to think what it means.  
Beauty of But first, lest any of you doubt it, let me ask you  
the Earth. what forms the great mass of the objects that fill  
our museums, setting aside positive pictures and  
sculpture? Is it not just the common household  
goods of past time? True it is that some people  
may look upon them simply as curiosities, but you  
and I have been taught most properly to look up-  
on them as priceless treasures that can teach us all  
sorts of things, and yet, I repeat, they are for the  
most part common household goods, wrought by  
"common fellows," as people say now, without  
any cultivation, men who thought the sun went  
round the earth, & that Jerusalem was exactly in  
the middle of the world.

Again, take another museum that we have still  
left us, our country churches. Take note of them,  
I say, to see how art ran through every thing; for  
you must not let the name of "church" mislead  
you: in times of real art people built their churches  
in just the same style as their houses; "ecclesiasti-  
cal art" is an invention of the last thirty years.  
Well, I myself am just fresh from an out-of-the-  
way part of the country near the end of the navi-  
gable Thames, where, within a radius of five  
miles, are some half-dozen tiny village churches,  
every one of which is a beautiful work of art, with  
its own individuality. These are the works of the  
Thames-side country bumpkins, as you would

call us, nothing grander than that. If the same sort of people were to design and build them now, (since within the last fifty years or so they have lost all the old traditions of building, though they clung to them longer than most people), they could not build anything better than the ordinary little plain Nonconformist chapels that one sees scattered about new neighbourhoods. That is what they correspond with, not an architect-designed new Gothic church. The more you study archæology the more certain you will become that I am right in this, and that what we have left us of earlier art was made by the unhelped people. Neither will you fail to see that it was made intelligently and with pleasure.

That last word brings me to a point so important that at the risk of getting wearisome I must add it to my old sentence and repeat the whole. Time was when everybody that made anything made a work of art besides a useful piece of goods, and it gave them pleasure to make it. That is an assertion from which nothing can drive me; whatever I doubt, I have no doubt of that. And, sirs, if there is anything in the business of my life worth doing, if I have any worthy aspiration, it is the hope that I may help to bring about the day when we shall be able to say, So it was once, so it is now.

Do not misunderstand me; I am not a mere praiser of past times. I know that in those days of which I speak life was often rough & evil enough, beset

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Lecture II. by violence, superstition, ignorance, slavery; yet  
Art and the I cannot help thinking that sorely as poor folks  
Beauty of needed a solace, they did not altogether lack one,  
the Earth. & that solace was pleasure in their work. Ah, sirs,  
much as the world has won since then, I do not  
think it has won for all men such perfect happiness  
that we can afford to cast aside any solace that  
nature holds forth to us. Or must we for ever be  
casting out one devil by another? Shall we never  
make a push to get rid of the whole pack of them  
at once?

I do not mean to say that all the work we do now  
is done without any pleasure, but I mean to say  
that the pleasure is rather that of conquering a good  
spell of work, a courageous and good feeling cer-  
tainly, or of bearing up well under the burden, &  
seldom, very seldom, comes to the pitch of com-  
pelling the workman, out of the fulness of his  
heart, to impress on the work itself the tokens of  
his manly pleasure.

Nor will our system of organizing the work allow  
of it. In almost all cases there is no sympathy be-  
tween the designer and the man who carries out  
the design; not unseldom the designer also is  
driven to work in a mechanical, down-hearted kind  
of way, and I don't wonder at it. I know by ex-  
perience that the making of design after design,  
mere diagrams, mind you, without one self execut-  
ing them, is a great strain upon the mind. It is  
necessary, unless all workmen of all grades are to



be permanently degraded into machines, that the hand should rest the mind as well as the mind the hand. And I say that this is the kind of work which the world has lost, supplying its place with the work which is the result of the division of labour.

That work, whatever else it can do, cannot produce art, which must, as long as the present system lasts, be entirely confined to such works as are the work from beginning to end of one man: pictures, independent sculpture, and the like. As to these, on the one hand, they cannot fill the gap which the loss of popular art has made, nor can they, especially the more imaginative of them, receive the sympathy which should be their due. I must speak plainly and say that as things go it is impossible for anyone who is not highly educated to understand the higher kind of pictures. Nay, I believe most people receive very little impression indeed from any pictures but those which represent the scenes with which they are thoroughly familiar. The aspect of this as regards people in general is to my mind much more important than that which has to do with the unlucky artist; but he also has some claim upon our consideration; & I am sure that this lack of the general sympathy of simple people weighs very heavily on him, and makes his work feverish and dreamy, or crabbed and perverse.

No, be sure if the people is sick its leaders also have need of healing. Art will not grow and flourish

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

ish, nay, it will not long exist, unless it be shared by all people; and for my part I don't wish that it should.

Therefore it is that I stand before you to say that the world has in these days to choose whether she will have art or leave it, and that we also, each one of us, have to make up our minds which camp we will or can join, those that honestly accept art or those that honestly reject it.

Once more let me try to put into words what these two alternatives mean. If you accept it, it must be part of your daily lives, and the daily life of every man. It will be with us wherever we go, in the ancient city full of traditions of past time, in the newly-cleared farm in America or the colonies, where no man has dwelt for traditions to gather round him; in the quiet countryside as in the busy town, no place shall be without it. You will have it with you in your sorrow as in your joy, in your work-a-day hours as in your leisure. It shall be no respecter of persons, but be shared by gentle and simple, learned & unlearned, & be as a language that all can understand. It will not hinder any work that is necessary to the life of man at the best, but it will destroy all degrading toil, all enervating luxury, all foppish frivolity. It will be the deadly foe of ignorance, dishonesty, and tyranny, and will foster good-will, fair dealing, and confidence between man & man. It will teach you to respect the highest intellect with a manly reverence, but



not to despise any man who does not pretend to be what he is not; and that which will be the instrument that it shall work with & the food that shall nourish it shall be man's pleasure in his daily labour, the kindest and best gift that the world has ever had.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Again I say, I am sure that this is what art means, no less; that if we attempt to keep art alive on other terms, we are but bolstering up a sham, and that it would be far better for us to accept the other alternative, the frank rejection of art, as many people, & they not the worst of us, have already done. To these and not to me you must go if you want to have any clear idea of what is hoped for the future of the world when art is laid within her tomb. Yet I think I can in a measure judge from the present tendency of matters what is likely to happen to those things which we handicraftsmen have to deal with.

When men have given up the idea that the work of men's hands can ever be pleasurable to them, they must, as good men and true, do their utmost to reduce the work of the world to a minimum; like us artists they must do all they can to simplify the life of man, to reduce his wants as much as possible; & doubtless in theory they will be able to reduce them more than we shall, for it is clear that the waste of tissue caused by a search after beauty will be forbidden: all ornament will cease from the work of men's hands, though still, wher-

Lecture II.      ever nature works there will be beauty. The gar-  
Art and the      ment shall be unadorned, though the moth that  
Beauty of      frets it is painted with silver and pearl. London  
the Earth.      shall be a desert of hideousness, though the blos-  
som of the "London pride" be more daintily  
flecked than the minutest missal that ever monk  
painted. And when all is done there will yet be too  
much work, that is to say, too much pain in the  
world.

What then? Machines then. Truly we shall have  
a good stock to start with, but not near enough.  
Some men must press on to martyrdom, and toil  
to invent new ones, till at last pretty nearly every-  
thing that is necessary to men will be made by  
machines. I don't see why it should not be done.  
I myself have boundless faith in their capacity. I  
believe machines can do everything, except make  
works of art.

And yet again, what next? Supposing we shall  
be able to get martyrs enough (or say slaves) to  
make all the machines that will still be needed, &  
to work them, shall we still be able to get rid of all  
labour, of all that which we have found out is an  
unmitigated curse? And what will our consciences  
be like (since I started by supposing us all to be  
conscientious people), when we think we have  
done all that we can do, and must still be waited  
upon by groaning, discontented wretches? What  
shall we do, I say?

Well, I must say that my imagination will stretch

no further than to suggest rebellion in general as a remedy, the end of which rebellion, if successful, must needs be to set up some form of art again as a necessary solace of mankind.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

But to say the truth, this leads me to making another suggestion, a practical one I consider it. Suppose we start by rebelling at once; because when I spoke of the world having to choose between accepting and rejecting art, I did not suppose that its choice could be final if it chose to reject it. No, the rebellion will have to come and will be victorious, don't doubt that; only if we wait till the tyranny is firmly established our rebellion will have to be a Nihilistic one; every help would be gone save deadly anger and the hope that comes of despair; whereas if we begin now, the change and the counter-change will work together, and the new art will come upon us gradually, and we shall one day see it marching on steadily and victoriously, though its battle has raised no clamour, we, or our sons, or our sons' sons.

How shall our rebellion begin then? What is the remedy for the lack of due pleasure in their work which has befallen all craftsmen, and for the consequent sickness of art and degradation of civilization?

I am afraid whatever answer I may make to that question will disappoint you. I myself suffer so sorely from the lack above-mentioned that I have little remedy in myself save that of fostering dis-

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

content. I have no infallible nostrum to cure an evil whose growth is centuries old. Any remedies I can think of are commonplace enough. In those old days of popular art, the world, in spite of all the ills that beset life, was struggling toward civilization & liberty, & it is in that way which we must also struggle, unless you think that we are civilized enough already, as I must confess I do not. Education on all sides is what we must look to. We may expect, if we do not learn much, to learn this at least, that we know but little, & that knowledge means aspiration or discontent, call it which you will.

I do not doubt that, as far as our schools of art go, education is bringing us to that point. I do not think any reasonable man can consider them a failure when the condition of the ornamental part of the individual arts is considered at the time of their foundation. True it is that those who established them were partly influenced by a delusive expectation that they would presently be able to supply directly a demand which was felt for trained & skilful designers of goods; but, though this hope failed them, they have no doubt influenced both that side of art & others also; among all that they have done not the least is that public recognition of the value of art in general which their very existence implies: or, to speak more correctly, their existence and the interest that is felt in them, is a token of people's uneasiness at the present disorganized state of the arts.



Perhaps you who study here, & represent such a large body of people who must needs have some aspirations towards the progress of the arts, will excuse a word or two from me a little less general than the rest I have been saying. I think I have a right to look upon you as enrolled soldiers of that rebellion against blank ugliness that I have been preaching this evening. You, therefore, above all people are bound to be careful not to give cause to the enemy to blaspheme. You are bound to be specially careful to do solid, genuine work, & eschew all pretence and flashiness.

Be careful to eschew all vagueness. It is better to be caught out in going wrong when you have had a definite purpose, than to shuffle and slur so that people can't blame you because they don't know what you are at. Hold fast to distinct form in art. Don't think too much of style, but set yourself to get out of you what you think beautiful, & express it, as cautiously as you please, but, I repeat, quite distinctly and without vagueness. Always think your design out in your head before you begin to get it on the paper. Don't begin by slobbering & messing about in the hope that something may come out of it. You must see it before you can draw it, whether the design be of your own invention or nature's. Remember always, form before colour, & outline, silhouette, before modelling; not because these latter are of less importance, but because they can't be right if the first are wrong.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Lecture II. Now, upon all these points you may be as severe  
Art and the with yourselves as you will, and are not likely to  
Beauty of be too severe.  
the Earth.

Furthermore, those of you especially who are designing for goods, try to get the most out of your material, but always in such a way as honours it most. Not only should it be obvious what your material is, but something should be done with it which is specially natural to it, something that could not be done with any other. This is the very *raison d'être* of decorative art: to make stone look like ironwork, or wood like silk, or pottery like stone is the last resource of the decrepitude of art. Set yourselves as much as possible against all machine work (this to all men). But if you have to design for machine work, at least let your design show clearly what it is. Make it mechanical with a vengeance, at the same time as simple as possible. Don't try, for instance, to make a printed plate look like a hand-painted one: make it something which no one would try to do if he were painting by hand, if your market drives you into printed plates: I don't see the use of them myself. To sum up, don't let yourselves be made machines, or it is all up with you as artists. Though I don't much love the iron and brass machines, the flesh & blood ones are more terrible & hopeless to me; no man is so clumsy or base a workman that he is not fit for something better than that.

Well, I have said that education is the first remedy for the barbarism which has been bred by the hurry of civilization and competitive commerce. To know that men lived & worked mightily before you is an incentive for you to work faithfully now, that you may leave something to those who come after you.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

What next is to be thought of after education? I must here admit that if you accept art and join the ranks of those who are to rise in rebellion against the Philistines, you will have a roughish time of it. "Nothing for nothing and not much for a dollar," says a Yankee somewhere, and I am sorry to say it is the rule of nature also. Those of us who have money will have to give of it to the cause, & all of us will have to give time, and thought, and trouble to it; and I must now consider a matter of the utmost importance to art and to the lives of all of us, which we can, if we please, deal with at once, but which emphatically claims of us time, thought, and money. Of all the things that is likely to give us back popular art in England, the cleaning of England is the first and the most necessary. Those who are to make beautiful things must live in a beautiful place. Some people may be inclined to say, and I have heard the argument put forward, that the very opposition between the serenity & purity of art and the turmoil & squalor of a great modern city stimulates the invention of artists, and produces special life in the art of to-

Lecture II. Art and the Beauty of the Earth.

day. I cannot believe it. It seems to me that at the best it but stimulates the feverish & dreamy qualities that throw some artists out of the general sympathy. But apart from that, these are men who are stuffed with memories of more romantic days and pleasanter lands, and it is on these memories they live, to my mind not altogether happily for their art; and you see it is only a very few men who could have even these doubtful advantages.

I abide by my statement that those who are to make beautiful things must live in beautiful places, but you must understand I do not mean to claim for all craftsmen a share of those gardens of the world, or of those sublime & awe-inspiring mountains and wastes that men make pilgrimages to see; that is to say, not a personal share. Most of us must be content with the tales of the poets and painters about these places, and learn to love the narrow spot that surrounds our daily life for what of beauty and sympathy there is in it.

For surely there is no square mile of earth's inhabitable surface that is not beautiful in its own way, if we men will only abstain from wilfully destroying that beauty; and it is this reasonable share in the beauty of the earth that I claim as the right of every man who will earn it by due labour; a decent house with decent surroundings for every honest and industrious family; that is the claim which I make of you in the name of art. Is it such an exorbitant claim to make of civilization? of a



civilization that is too apt to boast in after-dinner speeches; too apt to thrust her blessings on far-off peoples at the cannon's mouth before she has improved the quality of those blessings so far that they are worth having at any price, even the smallest. Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Well, I am afraid that claim is exorbitant. Both you as representatives of the manufacturing districts, and I as representing the metropolis, seem hitherto to have assumed that, at any rate; nor is there one family in a thousand that has established its claim to the right aforesaid. It is a pity though; for if the claim is to be considered inadmissible, then is it most certain that we have been simply filling windbags and weaving sand-ropes by all the trouble we have taken in founding schools of art, National Galleries, South Kensington Museums, and all the rest of it.

I have said education is good, is necessary, to all people; neither can you if you would withhold it; and yet to educate people with no hope, what do you expect to come of that? Perhaps you might learn what to expect in Russia.

Look you, as I sit at my work at home, which is at Hammersmith, close to the river, I often hear go past the window some of that ruffianism of which a good deal has been said in the papers of late, and has been said before at recurring periods. As I hear the yells and shrieks & all the degradation cast on the glorious tongue of Shakespeare &

Lecture II. Milton, as I see the brutal reckless faces & figures go past me, it rouses the recklessness & brutality Art and the Beauty of in me also, & fierce wrath takes possession of me, the Earth. till I remember, as I hope I mostly do, that it was my good luck only of being born respectable and rich that has put me on this side of the window among delightful books and lovely works of art, & not on the other side, in the empty street, the drink-steeped liquor-shops, the foul and degraded lodgings. What words can say what all that means? Do not think, I beg of you, that I am speaking rhetorically in saying that when I think of all this, I feel that the one great thing I desire is that this great country should shake off from her all foreign and colonial entanglements, & turn that mighty force of her respectable people, the greatest power the world has ever seen, to giving the children of these poor folk the pleasures & the hopes of men. Is that really impossible? is there no hope of it? If so, I can only say that civilization is a delusion and a lie; there is no such thing and no hope of such a thing.

But since I wish to live, & even to be happy, I cannot believe it impossible. I know by my own feelings & desires what these men want, what would have saved them from this lowest depth of savagery: employment which would foster their self-respect and win the praise and sympathy of their fellows, and dwellings which they could come to with pleasure, surroundings which would soothe

and elevate them; reasonable labour, reasonable rest. There is only one thing that can give them this, and that is art.

I have no doubt that you think this statement a ridiculous exaggeration, but it is my firm conviction nevertheless, & I can only ask you to remember that in my mind it means the properly organized labour of all men who make anything; that must at least be a mighty instrument in the raising of men's self-respect, in the adding of dignity to their lives. Once more, "Nothing for nothing and very little for a dollar." You can no more have art without paying for it than you can have anything else, & if you care about art, as you must when you come to know it, you will not shrink from the necessary sacrifice. After all, we are the descendants and countrymen of those who have well known how to give the lesser for the greater. What you have to sacrifice is chiefly money, that is, force, and dirt; a serious sacrifice I know; but perhaps, as I have said, we have made greater in England aforetime; nay, I am far from sure that dirt will not in the long run cost us more in hard cash even than art will.

So which shall we have, art or dirt?

What is to be done, then, if we make the better choice? The land we live in is not very big either in actual acreage or in scale of fashion, but I think it is not our natural love for it only that makes us think it as fit as any land for the peaceful dwellings

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Lecture II. of serious men. Our fathers have shown us that, Art and the if it could otherwise be doubted. I say, without fear Beauty of of contradiction, that no dwelling of men has ever the Earth. been sweeter or pleasanter than an ancient English house; but our fathers treated our lovely land well, and we have treated it ill. Time was when it was beautiful from end to end, and now you have to pick your way carefully to avoid coming across blotches of hideousness which are a disgrace, I will not say to civilization, but to human nature. I have seen no statistics of the size of these blotches in relation to the unspoiled, or partially spoiled, country, but in some places they run together so as to cover a whole county, or even several counties, while they increase at a fearful rate, fearful in good earnest and literally. Now, while this goes on unchecked, nay, unlamented, it is really idle to talk about art. While we are doing this or letting it be done, we are really covertly rejecting art, and it would be honester and better for us if we did so openly. If we accept art we must atone for what we have done and pay the cost of it. We must turn this land from the grimy back yard of a workshop into a garden. If that seems difficult, or rather impossible, to some of you, I cannot help it; I only know that it is necessary.

As to its being impossible, I do not believe it. The men of this generation even have accomplished matters that but a very little while ago would have been thought impossible. They conquered their



difficulties because their faces were set in that direction; & what was done once can be done again. Why even the money and the science that we expend in devices for killing and maiming our enemies present and future would make a good nest-egg towards the promotion of decency of life if we could make up our minds to that tremendous sacrifice.

However, I am far from saying that mere money can do much or indeed anything: it is our will that must do it. Nor need I attempt to try to show how that will should express itself in action. True I have, in common with some others, ideas as to what steps would best help us on our way, but those ideas would not be accepted by you, & I feel sure that when you are thoroughly intent on the goal you will find the means to reach it, & it is of infinitesimal importance what those means may be. When you have accepted the maxim that the external aspect of the country belongs to the whole public, & that whoever wilfully injures that property is a public enemy, the cause will be on its way to victory.

Meantime it is encouraging to me to think there is one thing that makes it possible for me to stand here, in a district that makes as much smoke as pottery, and to say what I have been saying on the subject of dirt, and that is that quite lately there has been visible expression given to a feeling on this subject, which has doubtless been long grow-

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

Lecture II.  
Art and the  
Beauty of  
the Earth.

ing. If I am a crazy dreamer, as may well be, yet there are many members and supporters of such societies as the Kyrle and the Commons Preservation Societies, who have not time to dream, and whose craziness, if that befel them, would be speedily felt throughout the country.

I pray your pardon for having tried your patience so long. A very few words more, and I have done. Those words are words of hope. Indeed, if I have said anything that seemed to you hopeless, it has been, I think, owing to that bitterness which will sometimes overtake an impatient man when he feels how little his own hands can do towards helping the cause that he has at heart. I know that cause will conquer in the end, for it is an article of faith with me, that the world cannot drop back into savagery, & that art must be its fellow on the forward march. I know well it is not for me to prescribe the road which that progress must take. I know that many things that seem to me to-day clinging hindrances, nay, poisons to that progress, may be furtherers of it, medicines to it, though they be fated to bring terrible things to pass before the visible good comes of them. But that very faith impels me to speak according to my knowledge, feeble as it may be and rash as the words may sound; for every man who has a cause at heart is bound to act as if it depended on him alone, however well he may know his own unworthiness; & thus is action brought to birth from mere opinion.

And in all I have been saying I have had steadily Lecture II.  
in mind that you have asked me to speak to you Art and the  
as a friend, & that I could do no less than be quite Beauty of  
open and fearless before my friends and fellow- the Earth.  
craftsmen.

Printed at the Chiswick Press with the Golden  
type designed by William Morris for the Kelm-  
scott Press, and finished on the 6th day of  
December, 1898. Published by Longmans & Co.,  
39, Paternoster Row, London.







85-B 8159

GETTY CENTER LIBRARY



3 3125 00775 3482

